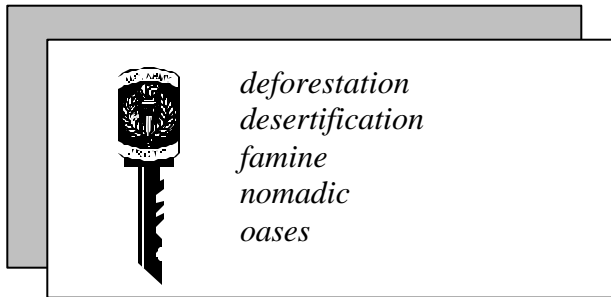
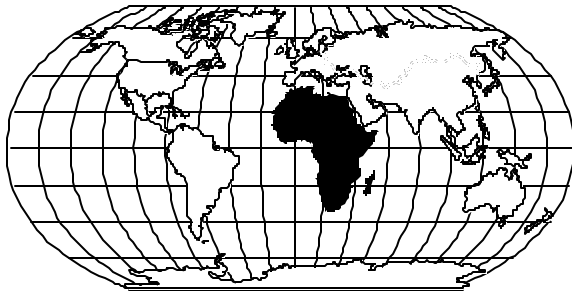


LESSON 6: AFRICA — THE PLATEAU CONTINENT



INTRODUCTION



Africa (Illustration 5.6.1) is the second largest continent. It is connected to the largest continent, Asia, by the Sinai Peninsula. With much of its land over 1000 feet in elevation, and few lowlands or mountainous areas, it is often called a plateau continent. In contrast to the Americas, Europe, and Asia, Africa is without a mountain range of continental proportions such as the North American Cordillera and Andes, Alpine, and Himalaya Mountain Systems.

Like South America, Africa extends about 5000 miles from north to south, but it is located farther north than South America. It is the only continent crossed by both tropics and the Equator. Because the Equator bisects it, Africa has similar climate and vegetation in its northern and southern halves. It is an excellent example of basic climate as discussed in the first lesson of this chapter. Africa is hot and rainy at the Equator with jungle vegetation. Moving away from the Equator, the land becomes a savanna with wet and dry seasons. At the tropics, are deserts and semi-deserts.

In the south where the Tropic of Capricorn crosses Africa are the Namib and Kalahari Deserts, and in the north where the Tropic of Cancer crosses Africa are the Libyan and Sahara Deserts. The Sahara, which is mostly a plateau between 500 and 2000 feet high, is the largest desert in the world extending 3000 miles east to west and 1200 miles north to south. Covered by areas of sand, rock, and gravel, the Sahara includes the Ahaggar and Tibesti Mountains and part of the Atlas Mountains. The Sahel south of the Sahara marks a zone between desert and savanna where rainfall is irregular and drought and **famine** often occur.

The three greatest rivers in Africa are the Nile, Zaire (formerly the Congo), and the Niger. The Nile is the longest river in the world flowing over 4,000 miles from the Equator north to the Mediterranean Sea. Its main trunk is formed by the joining of the Blue Nile and the White Nile. These flow from Lake Victoria, the largest lake in Africa at almost 27,000 square miles. Other large lakes include the following: Lake Chad at the meeting point of four countries — Chad, Niger, Nigeria, and Cameroon (Illustration 5.6.2); Lake Tanganyika, the second largest lake in Africa; and Lake Malawi, often called the Calendar Lake because it is 365 miles long and 52 miles across at its widest point.

Lakes Tanganyika and Malawi make up part of the Great Rift Valley in eastern Africa. A rift valley forms when parallel cracks occur in the Earth's crust and the land between them sinks. The deepest parts of the valley contain long, narrow lakes.

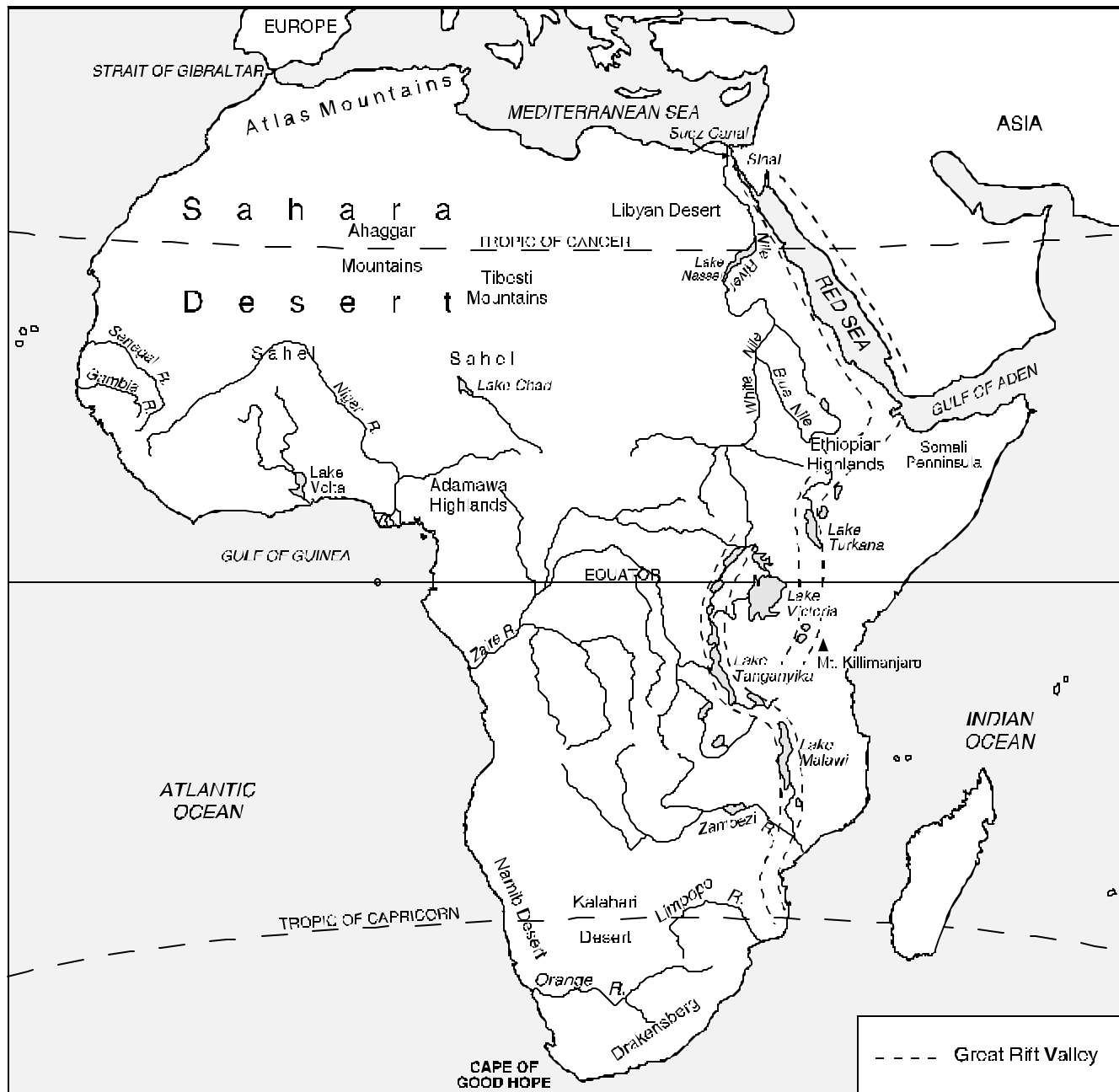


Illustration 5.6.1 — African Terrain

The eastern rift of Africa's Great Rift Valley includes the Red Sea, a trench cut through the Ethiopian Highlands into Kenya and Tanzania (Illustration 5.6.2), and Lake Turkana. The western rift runs down western Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, and Tanzania, then through Malawi to southern Mozambique, and includes Lakes Tanganyika and Malawi. Lake

Victoria lies between the eastern and western rifts but is not part of the Great Rift Valley.

IMPORTANT HISTORICAL/POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS

As in Asia where great civilizations flourished along rivers, the ancient Egyptians

created a kingdom along the Nile about 5000 years ago. They developed a form of writing, built huge pyramids that still stand today, and made important contributions to art, astronomy, medicine, architecture, and geometry. After being conquered by the Greeks and Romans, among others, Egypt was conquered by the Arabs in 640 A.D. Eventually the Arabs extended their influence and Islam over the entire north coast of the continent, south into Sudan, and along the east coast. Meanwhile, several great African states developed, including Ghana, Mali, and Ethiopia.

In 1467, the Portuguese sailed around the Cape of Good Hope in search of eastern Asia. Soon, Europeans had set up stations and forts along Africa's west coast. By the 1800s, explorers had crossed the continent and the Suez Canal had been dug, dramatically shortening the shipping route from Europe to Africa's east coast. Competition among European powers for African territory grew fierce.

In 1884, a conference of 14 countries, including the U.S., met in Berlin to attempt to settle colonial rivalries. Even though 80 percent of Africa was still under African rule at the time, the entire continent was divided up among European colonial powers without regard to the physical or human landscape that already existed on the continent. The only two African countries that remained independent were Ethiopia, which fought successfully against the Italians, and Liberia, established in 1822 as a home for freed African-American slaves.

Since World War II, African countries have struggled for independence, most gaining it in the 1960s and 70s. Yet, as in other world regions with a history of colonial rule, the transition to independence has not been easy. Many ethnic and political conflicts have resulted, and the political boundaries of Africa are still in transition today. In addition, much of Africa is

plagued by poverty, disease, inadequate health-care, malnutrition, agricultural problems, and a high illiteracy rate. Despite an abundance of natural resources, its economic growth has been slow and its rapidly growing population is not adequately supported. Parts of Africa are some of the most underdeveloped areas on Earth.

REGIONS

When discussing regions, Africa is generally divided into North Africa (Illustration 5.6.2, Region 1) and sub-Saharan Africa (Illustration 5.6.2, Regions 2 to 5). North Africa's location historically and geographically has put it in contact with people from Europe and Asia. At the same time, the vast Sahara Desert buffered sub-Saharan Africa from these influences for centuries. In sub-Saharan Africa, most people are descendants of Nilotic (originating in the southwestern Ethiopian Highlands), Cushitic (originating in the Ethiopian Highlands), and Bantu (originating in eastern Nigeria) ancestors — considered Black Africans. These main groups are divided into hundreds of other ethnic groups, many of which have their own language and religion.

In North Africa, most people are descendants of Arab, Berber (believed to be the oldest inhabitants of North Africa having settled along the Mediterranean by 3000 B.C.), and Black African ancestors. Due to this Arab ancestry and to Arab rule for over a thousand years, North Africa is more closely associated with the Middle Eastern region of Asia than with the rest of Africa. There are also huge oil and natural gas reserves in North Africa, just as there are in the Middle East. These reserves, along with industrial development and stable economies in most North African countries, make the region the most prosperous in Africa.



Illustration 5.6.2 — African Countries

In contrast, the countries of sub-Saharan Africa with little industry have weaker economies based mainly on subsistence farming and the exporting of raw materials. Also, compare the number of landlocked countries in sub-Saharan Africa with North Africa, which has no landlocked countries.

NORTH AFRICA: THE MOST PROSPEROUS REGION

People

The Sahara Desert covers most of North Africa and is sparsely populated. Small groups of people live around its **oases**, and **nomadic**

people travel across it in search of vegetation and water for their livestock. More and more, however, nomadic people are encouraged to settle in one place, so that governments have better control of them. Unfortunately, fragile lands which could recuperate when used in rotation, are often overused once they become a permanent settlement. In the semi-deserts along the Sahara's edges, the overuse of land and frequent droughts have resulted in **desertification**.

Most people in North Africa, however, live either in the Atlantic and Mediterranean coastal lowlands, in the Atlas Mountains (all of which receive adequate rainfall), or along the Nile River (the only large river providing water to the region). The Nile River basin is one of the most densely populated places on Earth and contains some of the most fertile land in the world. Lake Nasser, created on the Nile by the Aswan Dam, allows irrigation of many more millions of acres of farmland.

In Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia, Arabs make up 70 percent or more of the population, with many Berbers living in the Atlas Mountains. Most Egyptians are a mixture of Arabs and descendants of ancient Egyptians, while most Libyans are a mixture of Berbers and Arabs. In Sudan, half the population is Arabic (mostly in the north) and the remaining half is Black African — mostly Nilotic, including the Dinka, Nuer, and Shilluk. There are also European minorities in the region traced to colonial times.

Regardless of background, most people in North Africa, like their Asian neighbors in the Middle East, speak Arabic and follow the Islamic religion, which is a major force in North African society and government. In addition to Arabic, many people also speak a European or African language.

Non-Muslim minorities include a 10 percent Christian population in Egypt. In

Sudan's southern sections, 8 percent follow the Christian faith and 17 percent follow various African religions. Attempts by Sudan's government in the late 1980s to impose Islamic holy law on the non-Muslim south resulted in rebellion and a continuing civil war.

Economy

Economically, as already mentioned, North Africa is a prosperous region. Egypt, Libya, and Algeria are all major oil exporters, and Morocco, Tunisia, and Western Sahara (under Moroccan occupation) all have large supplies of phosphates, which are used in fertilizers. Other industry in the region produces iron, steel, chemicals, textiles, cement, and food products.

Morocco has strong fishing and tourism industries. Tourism is also important in Tunisia and Egypt. A great cultural, financial, and commercial center, Egypt is also politically the strongest country in the region and one of the strongest in the Middle East. Its capital, Cairo, is the largest African city, as well as one of the largest cities in the world.

Climate in the Atlas Mountains supports farming and livestock, and the Mediterranean climate along the Tunisian and Algerian coasts supports crops like grapes and olives. Egypt grows cotton, among other crops, and is famous for its cotton products.

Sudan is the poorest country in this region with most of the population employed in agriculture. Its economic development has been hindered by chronic civil war and major famines in the 1980s and 1990s.

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA: FOUR VERY DIVERSE REGIONS

This section begins with a discussion of the people of sub-Saharan Africa, followed by

information about the physical geography and economies of each of its four regions. (**Note:** Refer back to Illustrations 5.6.1 and 5.6.2 while reading about each region.)

People

As previously mentioned, the majority of the people living in sub-Saharan Africa are Black Africans, yet there are hundreds of different ethnic groups within this classification, many with their own language and religion. The following lists some of these ethnic groups along with the region of sub-Saharan Africa in which they reside.

- ◆ East Africa — Oromo, Amhara, Somalis, Ganda, Maasai, Hutu, and Tutsi
- ◆ West Africa — Fulani, Hausa, Asante, Ewe, Mende, Bambara, Malinke, and Dogon
- ◆ Central Africa — Baya, Azande, Ovimbundu, Kongo, Tonga, Luba, Mbuti, and Fang
- ◆ Southern Africa — Sotho, Zulu, Swazi, Herero, Shona, Ndebele, Xhosa, and Ovambo

Minorities in sub-Saharan Africa include:

- ◆ In East Africa — Asians mainly from India; Europeans; and groups of mixed Black African, Arab, and Persian (Iranian) descent such as the Swahili.
- ◆ In West Africa — Moors of mixed Arab, Berber, and Black African descent who make up a majority of the population in Mauritania.
- ◆ In Southern Africa — Africaners of mixed Dutch, French, German, and Black African descent considered the “white” minority in South Africa; Cape Coloreds and Cape Malays of mixed European, Asian, and Black African descent; Madagascans of mixed Black African and southeast Asian

descent; and Indians whose ancestors came to work on British plantations in the 1800s.

In addition to the hundreds of African languages related to particular ethnic groups, languages of former colonial powers are spoken in sub-Saharan Africa and are often recognized as the official languages of countries. A common language, usually a language used formerly for trading, may also be spoken throughout an entire region — for example, Swahili in East Africa, Arabic and Hausa in West Africa, and Shona in Southern Africa. For these reasons, many people in sub-Saharan Africa speak more than one language.

In addition to the many African religions related to particular ethnic groups, both Islam and Christianity are practiced in sub-Saharan Africa. Islam spread, of course, through contact with the Arabs and is followed mostly in the northern countries of East and West Africa, in the area often referred to as the transition zone between Arab North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa. Moving south away from North Africa are smaller percentages of people practicing Islam, with very few in Central or Southern Africa.

Christianity was brought to the continent by European missionaries and is widely practiced in Southern and Central Africa and in the southern countries of East and West Africa, with smaller percentages of practicing Christians in the countries approaching North Africa. In some cases, a mix of an African religion with Christianity or Islam is practiced.

East Africa

East Africa is Africa’s most mountainous region, including its highest peak, Mount Kilimanjaro, and the Ethiopian Highlands. The region also includes the Somali Peninsula, or Horn of Africa, and many lakes and rivers that help feed the Nile. The Horn of Africa is

mostly semi-desert, while grassy plains, most above 600 feet in elevation, cover much of Tanzania, Uganda, and Kenya. These plains support Africa's famous herds of wildlife, and Tanzanian and Kenyan national parks and game reserves are major tourist destinations. Unfortunately, while the parks and reserves protect wildlife, many also exclude local people who once used the land to graze livestock.

East Africa is the poorest region in Africa. Except for diamonds in Tanzania and copper in Uganda, it has few mineral resources, and there is little industry for processing raw materials. In addition, ethnic and political conflicts have hurt the region's economy. Some of the most recent conflicts (as of the 1990s) include the civil war in which Eritrea separated from Ethiopia; the ethnic fighting between Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda and Burundi; and fighting between clans in Somalia.

Most people in East Africa make a living by farming, many at a subsistence level. Since they are growing just enough to survive, it is devastating when crops are ruined due to insufficient rainfall. In the past, widespread famines have resulted. Export crops grown in the region, historically on the best land, include coffee, tea, tobacco, and cotton. Intensive farming and **deforestation** have further weakened the already fragile soil in much of the region.

West Africa

For centuries, the West African coast was an important trade route, supplying ivory, gold, and slaves for American plantations. In addition to trade, colonialism brought export crops and urbanization to the coast, while much of the interior remained untouched. It also led to political and ethnic strife once colonial powers withdrew. In Nigeria and Chad, as in

Sudan, there have been conflicts between the Muslim northerners and southerners who are mainly Christians or followers of an African religion. Civil wars as recent as the 1990s have occurred in Sierra Leone and Liberia.

Like North Africa, much of West Africa is plateau. The eastern boundary of West Africa is the Adamawa Highlands, partly created by molten rocks from volcanoes in the area. This volcanic soil provides fertile farmland in Cameroon. In contrast, the southern reaches of the Sahara, as well as the Sahel, lie in West Africa's northernmost land.

In the Sahel, desertification in certain regions has resulted from droughts and overuse of the fragile land. Nomadic peoples have been encouraged to remain in one place resulting in populations too large to be supported by the land. Droughts in the latter part of the twentieth century have severely affected crops and brought great hardship to populations in Niger, Mali, Mauritania, and Chad. Understandably, most people live in the southern half of the region along coastlines and rivers. In fact, about one-third of Africa's total population lives in West Africa — most in Nigeria.

While many West Africans are employed in subsistence agriculture, crops grown for export include cocoa, coffee, peanuts, and timber. Irrigation of land comes from rivers like the Niger, the largest in the region, Gambia, and Senegal, and from lakes like Chad and Volta. Volta is an artificial lake formed by the Akosombo Dam. These rivers also provide transportation for goods and people, and the rivers, lakes, and coastlines support fishing.

Unlike East Africa, West Africa possesses many mineral resources, including gold, diamonds, oil, natural gas, phosphates, and bauxite. Although Nigeria is oil-rich, it is deeply in debt, and its people have a very low

per capita income. The region is slightly more industrialized than East Africa.

Central Africa

The Zaire River basin covers much of Central Africa. To the basin's north in the Central African Republic and its south in Angola and Zambia are highland areas, with a thin strip of coastal lowlands in the west and the Great Rift Valley as a border in the east. With the Equator running through it, this region gets heavy rain and is very hot. Some of the low-lying areas are swampy, breeding mosquitoes and flies that spread dangerous diseases. This region is also the most heavily forested in Africa, supporting a productive timber industry that has also led to deforestation in some areas.

Central Africa is rich in mineral resources such as diamonds, copper, iron, oil, and manganese. Some countries like Gabon, Zaire, and Congo are more industrialized than their neighbors, yet still over half the population exists on subsistence farming. In Zaire, which has territory deep in the African interior, the economy is hindered because of poor transportation systems through the difficult vegetation and along the Zaire River, which has many rapids. Zambia, a landlocked country, is hurt by transportation costs associated with the long distance to a coastline. Central Africa's economy has also been hindered by a lengthy civil war in Angola and other conflicts in the region.

While Africa, in general, has one of the world's largest refugee populations, Central Africa, in particular, has huge refugee populations — both from people fleeing from one country to another within the region, as well as from people in surrounding regions seeking haven there. In the 1990s, Zaire accepted over one million refugees from Rwanda alone because of fighting in that country. Problems associated with refugee

populations include lost labor and income for the country losing the refugees and unemployment for the country gaining them. Political conflicts often erupt between the countries. Furthermore, the large concentrations of people in a particular area can lead to environmental problems.

Southern Africa

Much of Southern Africa's interior is a plateau surrounded by mountainous highlands, including the Drakensburg. These highlands drop off steeply to narrow coastal lowlands in the west and south and to a wider coastal plain in the east, especially in southern Mozambique. Rivers in the region cannot be used by ships because of their many waterfalls. The highlands are sparsely populated, as are Botswana and Namibia, covered by the Kalahari and Namib Deserts. As with the Sahara, desertification has occurred along the fringes of these two deserts.

The country of South Africa dominates this region. Considered the most developed and wealthiest country on the continent, it boasts the richest gold mine in the world. Here also are diamond and coal mines, fertile farmland, large cities, transportation networks, factories, and ports. Most of the wealth, however, is held by a small, white minority and was earned over years of racial segregation and inequality.

South Africa's policy of *apartheid* (an Afrikaans word meaning separateness), forced ethnic groups to live in ethnic-specific "homelands" consisting of the least desirable land, and denied them the rights to vote, to an adequate education, and to work as a skilled professional — which forced them into employment on white-owned farms and mines. In addition, South Africa interfered in the government of neighboring countries by supporting rebel forces and white-minority rule

and even occupying Namibia in an attempt to preserve its own policies.

Many countries throughout the world cut political and economic ties with South Africa because of *apartheid*, which was finally abolished in 1991 after years of internal and external opposition. Still, the effects of *apartheid*, such as inequalities in wealth, ownership, education, etc., will not be easily overcome.

Many people in this region are employed by agriculture, and there are a wide variety of export crops including wheat, apples, cotton, and citrus. In Madagascar and Mozambique, however, subsistence farming is prevalent, and these countries are some of the poorest in the world. Madagascar's growing population and deforestation threatens the island's unique plant and animal life, while Mozambique's economy has been hindered by civil war and drought.

Many of the remaining countries are rich in mineral wealth. Accordingly part of the population is employed in mining. The economies of Botswana, Swaziland, and Lesotho are tied to South Africa, with many people employed as laborers on farms and in mines in that country. Botswana, which has the richest diamond mine in the world, and Zimbabwe are two of the most stable countries in the region.